



*State of North Dakota*  
**DISTRICT COURT CHAMBERS**  
**OF**  
**The HONORABLE LAURIE A. FONTAINE**  
Melissa Morden, Electronic Recorder

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October 23, 2020

Petra H. Mandingo Hulm  
Clerk of the Supreme Court  
600 E. Boulevard Ave,  
Bismarck, ND 58505-0530

RE: Vacancy in NEJD Judgeship No.5

It is my strong recommendation to the members of the Court that they retain this judge position. This would be the best outcome for the citizens of the state and the judicial system. There is adequate office space and courtrooms that are mostly maintained by those counties in Pembina and Cavalier counties. These are both large courtrooms that can accommodate fairly large groups even in the current pandemic. Pembina County Courthouse is on the State register of historic buildings and the courtroom maintains much of its original woodwork and fixtures while having electronic updates. Particularly attorneys who travel here from other states are amazed at the beauty of the Pembina County courtroom.

We are a very large district in the NEJD and weighted caseload numbers do not adequately illustrate the judicial need. We have some areas in the district that are very high in poverty and need and a case that would take a certain amount of time in most areas takes longer in high poverty areas. The district works as a whole based on the location of the chambered judges. Taking one judge out of that rotation would impact all other judges as well as litigants and practicing lawyers. I can speak to this as a resident, my experience previously in practice of law, a prior State's Attorney, and as a judge. I will be returning to the practice of law and have a stake in the outcome of this decision.

I will always be an advocate for rural North Dakota. I would suggest that the best solution all around is to keep this position in a rural area based on the unique needs and size of our judicial district.

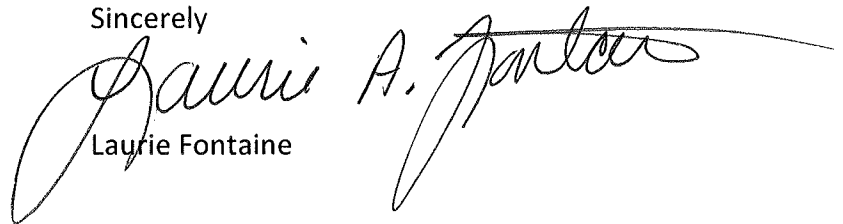
I previously sent a suggested legislative amendment that would allow the court to assign judges within an Administrative unit with more flexibility. If the court feels it necessary to even out case assignments

they could still assign judges from the NEJD to the NECJD for a designated number of cases. As the saying goes, two birds, one stone. This solution keeps a judge in a rural area while assisting the judge need in another district within our Unit.

It has been my honor to serve the citizens of this state as a District Court judge for the past twenty two years, as well as work with excellent colleagues in our judicial system. This position as well as the court recorder or paralegal position which assists the judge, contributes greatly to the economy in a rural area. Whomever has these positions may well buy a house in the area and become involved in the local community. It would be damaging to this rural community to loose these positions. The reality is our state is a rural state and to keep it thriving we cannot ignore the rural areas or people of the state. There is great value in maintaining the position while still getting a good result for the judiciary. There is also not much question that when services are mainly focused away from a rural community that translates to less of the service.

In order to keep all aspects of our state thriving we need to think about how to serve rural and urban areas and to think outside of the box to do that. I would request you keep the position of Judgeship No. 5 in the NEJD

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Laurie A. Fontaine". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned to the right of the word "Sincerely".

Laurie Fontaine